DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 337 321 RC 018 212

AUTHOR Reetz, Linda J.; And Others
TITLE Good Bye, Good Luck, Good Life: Are We Preparing Students with Handicaps for Successful Post-School Outcomes in South Dakota?
PUB DATE Mar 90
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Rural Education Symposium of the American Council on Rural Special Education and the National Rural and Small Schools Consortium (Tucson, AZ, March 18-22, 1990).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Needs; *Education Work Relationship; Higher Education; Individualized Education Programs; Postsecondary Education; *Rural Education; School Size; Secondary Education; *Special Education; Special Education Teachers; State Surveys; *Teacher Attitudes; *Transitional Programs
IDENTIFIERS *South Dakota

ABSTRACT

In response to findings that 50-80% of handicapped adults nationwide are unemployed, the state of South Dakota has mandated transition planning for handicapped secondary students. A statewide mail survey examined the awareness and attitudes of special education teachers about the need for transition services, the extent of current teacher training in transition, and the availability of post-secondary options in communities. Among 130 respondents, over 70% reported a need for formal transition planning as part of the IEP process and a need for goals for handicapped students in both employment and daily living skills. However, many teachers questioned the need for formal transition planning for high school students with learning disabilities. Almost all teachers agreed that cooperative agreements between adult services and public schools were critical to facilitating effective services and outcomes. About 74% of respondents felt that their preservice teacher education had not prepared them to assist students in transition to adult life, and 42% had had no in-service training in the area of transition. There were few differences between teachers in large and small schools, the most notable being that teachers in small schools reported far fewer options for post-secondary employment, housing, and technical training for the handicapped in their communities than did teachers in large schools. This paper contains tables and charts. (SV)

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ED 363821

Linda J. Reetz, Ed.D.
John J. Wheeler, Ph.D.
Karla A. Aplan
The University of South Dakota
School of Education
Delzell 111B
Vermillion, SD 57069

Good Bye, Good Luck, Good Life: Are We Preparing Students with Handicaps for Successful Post-School Outcomes in South Dakota?

Introduction

The transition of students with handicaps from school to adult life has become a major focal point among professionals in the fields of special education and rehabilitation. This emphasis has evolved in response to the alarming data which has indicated that between 50 and 80 percent of adults with handicaps are unemployed (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1983). Statewide follow-up studies in Colorado (Mithaug & Horiuchi, 1983; Mithaug, Horiuchi, & Fanning, 1985; Mithaug, Horiuchi, & McNulty, 1987); Vermont (Hasazi, Gordon, & Roe, 1985; Hasazi, Gordon, Roe, Hull, Finck, & Salembier, 1985); and Virginia (Wehman, Kregal, & Seyfarth, 1985) have revealed similar figures of unemployment, underemployment, and poor post-school adjustment of former special education students. Coupled with these figures are the unprecedented number of special education students, ages 18-21 years, who are leaving public school programs each year (Stark & Kiernan, 1986).

In response to this growing concern, Federal initiatives have begun to address the need for employment and transition services for students with handicaps (Will, 1984). As a result of these initiatives, major funding was appropriated for demonstration projects in as many as 26 states (TASH, D.C. Update, 1986). Despite the increased provision of funds for the establishment of programs in the areas of supported employment and transition, there still remains a critical shortage of programs and personnel trained in these areas nationwide (Cohen, Patton, & Melia, 1986). This shortage of programs and personnel is even more pronounced in rural areas (Vogelsberg, 1985). This, unfortunately, is the case in South Dakota which due to it's vast rural composition and sparse population (708,000), has had, in the past, limited programming in the area of transition. Subsequently, a personnel shortage of teachers and professionals trained in the area of secondary special education with an emphasis on transition also exists statewide.

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Recently, there have been changes in programming and personnel priorities at the state level which are responding to the post-school outcomes of special education students in the state of South Dakota. The state of South Dakota has mandated that transition planning for students with handicaps be implemented in the 1990-91 school year. In addition, model sites have been established which will attempt to operationalize a transition model for the state. In response to the statewide initiative, the present study attempted to examine several questions concerning transition programming in the state of South Dakota through a survey of special education teachers throughout the state. After an extensive review of the literature and existing transition program models four primary questions emerged. These questions are:

1. What is the perceived need for transition services?
2. Who should be responsible for these services?
3. What is the degree to which special education teachers in South Dakota have received pre-service and in-service training in transition, and is technical training needed to facilitate effective transition services?
4. Are secondary special education teachers aware of post-secondary options in their communities?

Method

Subjects

The subjects who participated in the study consisted of 130 randomly selected special education teachers throughout the state of South Dakota. Respondents included eighty eight persons with bachelor's degrees, forty-one with masters degrees and one with a doctoral degree. Most of the respondents, 101, served students from more than one categorical group, 21 served students labeled Learning Disabled and the others, 8, served other individual categories only. This was expected as South Dakota is a non-categorical state and identifies students as being in need of services (denoting mild/moderate handicapping conditions) and students being in need of prolonged assistance (denoting severe handicapping conditions). Teachers are awarded certification to serve students from preschool age through twelfth grade regardless of handicapping condition.

This is, in part, necessary to provide services to the many small and remote communities in the state. Of the respondents, 45 served students of all grade levels. This requires teachers to have many well developed skills and knowledge of the communities in which they serve to facilitate positive transition planning for secondary students.

Most of the respondents, 100, were employed by local education agencies. There were thirteen respondents from residential schools, eleven from special education cooperatives, three from Bureau of Indian Affairs Schools, and one each from a private and a junvenile detention school.

Procedures

The State Department of Education provided the names and addresses of all special education teachers in the state. Cooperatives and school districts were contacted to isolate teachers who serve secondary students with handicaps. Two hundred teachers were sent a survey form containing questions relating to demographic data regarding the teachers themselves, their specific jobs, and the communities in which they taught. In addition, survey questions regarding the need for transition and transition programming were asked. Questions were derived after an extensive review of the literature in transition and after reviewing other statewide surveys on transition, most notably Illinois (Bates, Suter, & Poelvoorde, 1987).

One hundred thirty, or 65%, of the surveys were returned and usable. Two others were returned but not included in the sample as the teachers were not serving handicapped students. These 130 surveys were used in the descriptive study. In spite of an attempt to secure only secondary teachers serving students with handicaps there were thirty respondents who served elementary through middle school students. Their responses were compared to those of the 100 secondary teachers.

Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis of the data was completed using percentages. Data on some survey items are presented according to subgroups: small versus large schools and secondary teachers versus elementary teachers.

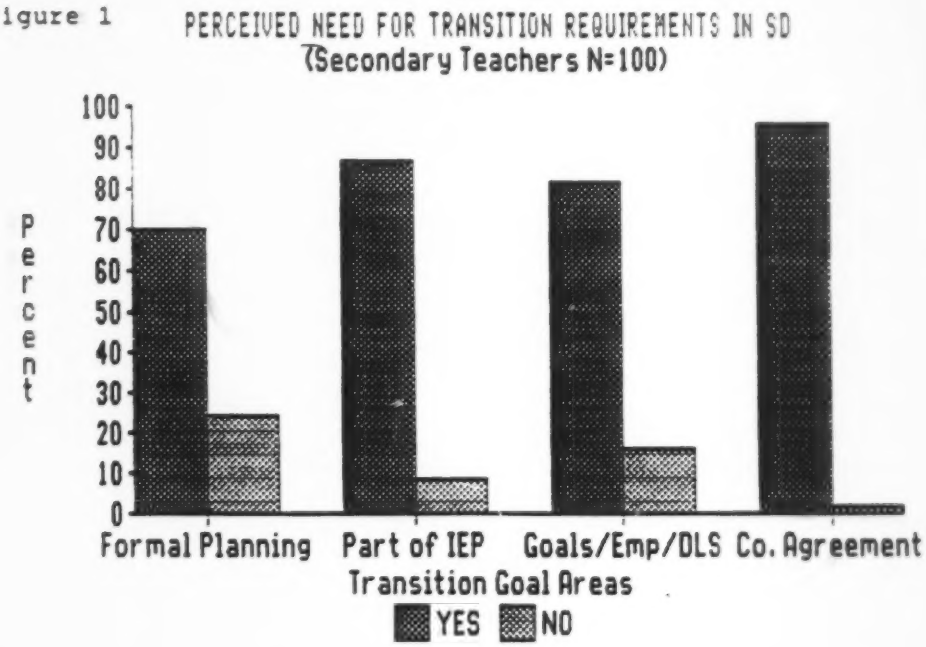
Results

The results of the study are presented in the same order as the basic research questions previously identified in the introduction section. All results are reported in percentages.

The initial question examined was the perceived need for transition planning requirements in the state of South Dakota. Figure 1 describes the perceived need for requiring various types of transition planning for secondary special education students. Teachers were asked whether formal transition planning should be required for secondary special education students. Seventy percent responded positively. Some respondents indicated that they did not feel that secondary transition planning was necessary for students

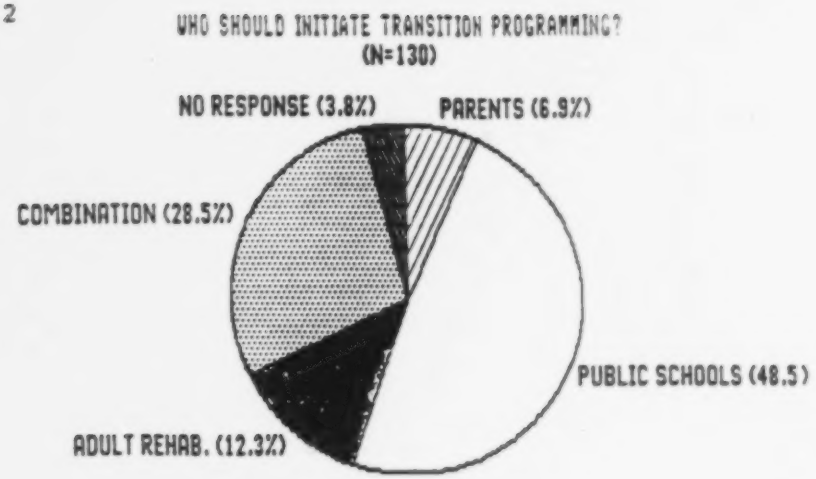
identified as Learning Disabled. Eighty-seven percent of the teachers felt that transition programming should be a component attached to the IEP, with eighty-two percent indicating a need for goals both in employment and daily living. Nearly all, ninety-six percent of the secondary teachers indicated that there should be local cooperative agreements between schools and agencies to ensure coordination of transition services. The results are displayed in Figure 1.

Figure 1



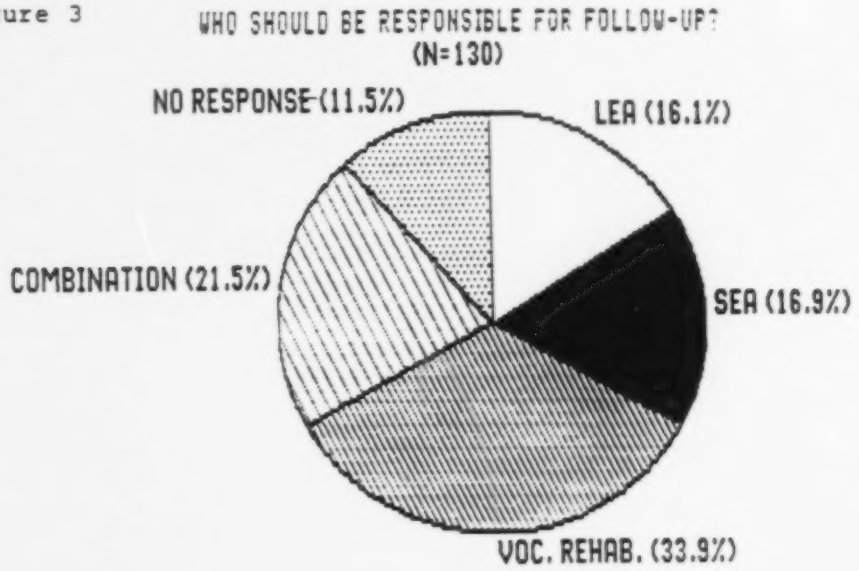
The second question related to who should be responsible for providing these services? This question was divided into responsibility for initiating such services and for providing follow-up. Figure 2 illustrates special education teachers perceptions of who should initiate transition services. Nearly half of the respondents indicated that public schools should be responsible for initiating this programming. The next largest proportion of respondents, or 28.5%, indicated that a joint responsibility among parents, schools, and adult rehabilitation services was needed to initiate such services. Smaller proportions of respondents indicated that primary responsibilty for initiation of transition services should be directed by adult vocational rehabilitation services, 12.3%, and parents, 6.9%.

Figure 2



The results relating to who should be responsible for follow-up of post-secondary outcomes of special education students is illustrated in Figure 3. The largest proportion of respondents, or 33.9%, indicated that adult vocational rehabilitation services should be solely responsible for the follow-up. The next largest proportion, 21.5%, indicated that a combination of these agencies should be responsible. Approximately, equal proportions of respondents indicated that the local education agencies (16.1%) or the state education agency (16.9%) should be charged with the responsibility of follow-up.

Figure 3



The third area examined was comprised of four questions relating to pre-professional training, in-service training, specific course work in transition programming, and need for technical assistance or training. These questions sought to examine the degree to which special education teachers in South Dakota have received training in transition programming and whether technical assistance is needed to provide such services. The results to these questions are summarized in Tables 1-3.

TABLE 1

Do you agree your preprofessional education prepared you for assisting students with handicaps in making the transition to adult life upon leaving school?

	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Disagree	4 Strongly Disagree	N/R
Small Schools (N=78)	3.85%	14.10%	63.38%	14.10%	2.56%
Large Schools (N=42)	4.76%	23.81%	50.00%	16.67%	4.76%
Secondary Teachers (N=100)	5.00%	14.00%	60.00%	17.00%	4.00%
Elementary/Middle School Teachers (N=30)	3.33%	26.67%	56.67%	6.67%	6.67%
All Respondents	4.62%	16.92%	59.23%	14.62%	4.62%

The results from Table 1 indicated that the majority of respondents from both small and large schools, 77% and 67%, either disagreed or strongly disagreed that their preprofessional training prepared them to assist students with handicaps in the transition process. Of the secondary teachers who responded, 77% also disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were prepared based on their preprofessional training. The elementary/middle school teachers, 63%, either disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were adequately prepared based on their preprofessional training.

Table 2 illustrates approximately how much in-service training, in hours, that teachers have had in the area of transition. The results indicated that of all respondents, 42% had none, 18% had 1-2 hours, 13% had 3-5 hours, 8% had 1 day, and 18% had the equivalent of 1 week's worth of in-service training. The results specific to secondary teachers indicated that 39% had none, 19% had 1-2 hours, 14% had 3-5 hours, 8% had 1 day, 19% had 1 week's worth, and 1% did not respond.

Table 2

Approximately how much in-service training have you had in the area of transition?

	None	1-2 Hours	3-5 Hours	1 Day	1 Week	N/R
Small Schools (N=78)	46.15%	15.38%	10.26%	10.26%	17.95%	0%
Large Schools (N=42)	35.71%	23.81%	16.67%	4.76%	16.67%	2.38%
Secondary (N=100)	39.00%	19.00%	14.00%	8.00%	19.00%	1.00%
Elementary (N=30)	53.33%	13.33%	10.00%	6.67%	16.67%	0%
All Respondents	42.31%	17.69%	13.08%	7.69%	18.46%	.77%

The results from Table 3 indicated that of all respondents surveyed only 15% had taken a course on transition, while 85%, or nearly five times as many, had not. Nearly identical percentages of secondary teachers surveyed , 84% indicated that they, also, had not taken a course on transition. There were also no differences between teachers in small versus large schools.

Table 3

Have you ever had a course on transition programming?

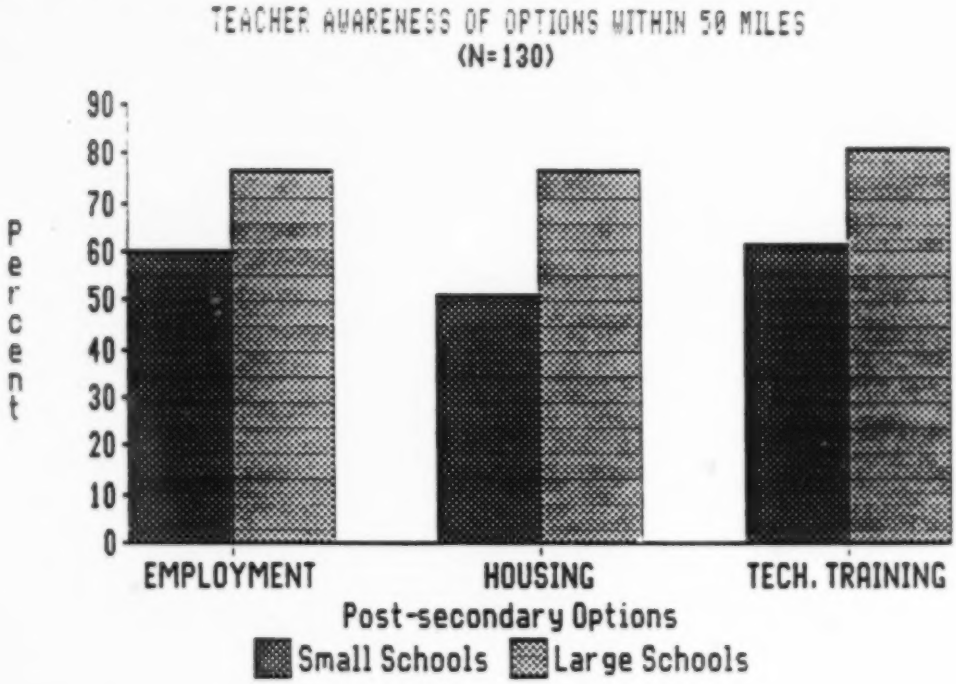
	Yes	No
Small Schools (N=78)	15.38%	83.33%
Large Schools (N=42)	14.29%	85.71%
Secondary (N=100)	15.00%	84.00%
Elementary (N=30)	13.33%	86.67%
All (N=130)	14.62%	84.62%

When asked whether secondary teachers were in need of technical assistance to provide adequate transition programming, 85% reported a need for technical assistance and 71% indicated a need for improved professional training via coursework. Teachers in small schools indicated a

slightly greater need for technical assistance in both in-service and professional preparation when compared with teachers in larger communities.

The final question asked whether teachers were aware of post-secondary options in the areas of employment, housing, and technical training for persons with handicaps within a 50-mile radius of their schools. The results are displayed in Figure 4.

Figure 4



The results indicated that of the teachers from small communities surveyed, 60.26% were aware of employment options, 51.26% were aware of housing options, and 61.54% were aware of technical training options. Conversely, teachers responding from large communities indicated that 76.16% were aware of employment options, 76.19% were aware of housing options, and 80.95% were aware of technical training options within a 50-mile radius of their schools. These results indicated consistently greater awareness among teachers from large communities regarding post-secondary options for individuals with handicaps.

Discussion

This study represents an attempt to address the present state of transition services to students with handicaps in South Dakota and how these services might be improved. Although the sample size is limited and the results from this study should not be overgeneralized, many important preliminary findings to our questions regarding transition have emerged.

Over two-thirds of all secondary teachers surveyed reported a need for formal transition planning as part of the IEP process. They further agreed that there was a need for goals in both employment and daily living skills for students with handicaps. An analysis of comments regarding this question indicated that many teachers questioned the importance of formal transition planning for high school students with learning disabilities. This is contrary to the findings of Wagner (1989), whose results indicated that students with learning disabilities have equal difficulty with post-school adjustment.

The importance of cooperative agreements between adult services and public schools was indicated by nearly all respondents, 96%. This is a critical element in facilitating effective services and outcomes.

Nearly half of all respondents believed that public schools should serve as a catalyst for initiating transition programming, while far fewer saw the local schools as being responsible for follow-up in this process. Respondents did not agree on which group or agency should actually be responsible for follow-up.

It is apparent that there is a need among special education personnel for training in transition programming. This was true for both elementary and secondary teachers as well as teachers in both small and large communities. It is vitally important that both in-service and pre-professional transition training be provided if effective programs are to result.

Finally, teachers in small rural communities indicated far less awareness of post-secondary employment, housing, and technical training options for special education in their communities than their large community counterparts. This is probably due to the sparse population and limited opportunities which exist in some of the rural communities in South Dakota.

Based on these preliminary findings one might question the quality of post-secondary outcomes for students with handicaps in South Dakota. The results from this study, although preliminary in nature, indicate that teachers are in need of training, services are in need of development and coordination, and that post-secondary options must be identified in all regions of the state. It is essential that these elements be addressed in greater detail if current state initiatives in the area of transition are to be successful.

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